

ABOUT MUSIC

– By Mariss McTucker

The Hooligans: Beggars and Thieves

Recorded live at Yellowstone House in Paradise Valley, MT, and Blue Roan Recording/Peach Tree Studios in Bozeman, MT; recorded and mixed by Cornell “Doc” Wiley and R.J. Hatten; produced by Bill Payne and Tom Garnsey, 2013.

One expects nifty musicianship from the long-time Bozeman band, The Hooligans. We are not disappointed, especially since it’s a live recording.

The debut album from this polished ensemble features core members together since the ’90s: Tom Garnsey, guitars/vocals, Rich Robiscoe, bass, Betsy Wise, vocals, Ron Craighead, drums/vocals, and Bob Britten, electric guitar/vocals. Recent additions include co-producer and Little Feat alum Bill Payne on keys/synthesizer and vocals, and Tom Murphy on mandolin and vocals.

The band is joined by guests Jimmy Lange, keyboards/synthesizer and vocals, and recording artists Tim O’Brien on fiddle, Spencer Bohren on lap steel, and English reggae singer Pato Banton. Throw in terrific sound production by Grammy-winning engineer Cornell “Doc” Wiley and mastering by multiple Grammy-holder Gavin Lurssen, and you have a product with quite the pedigree.

Band members share authorship amidst a sprinkling of traditional tunes, the genres covering rock, blues, reggae, folk – you name it. Lots of story songs are woven into interesting melodies with wisps of the Atlanta Sound, suffused with that southern ambience.

Let’s get going with a blues number, the Garnsey/Payne “If I Had a Mind To.” The duo’s swamp-rock “Devil in Your Smile” boasts a swooping lead vocal by Payne and quivering, smooth lap steel from Bohren.

The traditional Appalachian chestnut, “Katy Cruel,” is plunked into the bayou and given a sensual and mysterious treatment. With Garnsey taking lead vocal, it sports a cool rhythmic hook and boatloads of soulful licks – squiggly Britten guitar, crisp, rock-steady percussion and bass, moody mando, silky fiddle, and a soaring, stutter-step accordion by Payne on synth. Wow!

“7th Daughter,” which marries Payne’s melody to lyrics by former Grateful Dead lyricist Robert Hunter, rocks in with New Orleans-esque piano-pounding and a slippery guitar break. The reggae tune “Topsy Turvy World” features Betsy Wise on lead vocal, accompanied by Banton and Tom’s daughter, Alison; and Britten sings lead on his own “Mr. Tight,” adding guitar licks and trading breaks with Garnsey.

Garnsey’s “Shoot the Moon” is country-rock and moody, with terrific group harmonies, a hallmark of the recording. It’s got atmosphere like a James Lee Burke novel. How’s “laughing crazy like some finger-poppin’ toy” grab you?

Richard Thompson’s quiet and wistful love song, “Beeswing,” ends the album. “As long as there’s no price on love, I’ll stay, you wouldn’t want me any other way,” sings our protagonist. We hear a chorus of lush background ooh-oohs, a light rim-tap, sweet mandolin, and soft piano chords ... a soft ending to a masterful album. Visit the group at www.hooligans.com for more information.

The Lil’ Smokies

Engineered by Adam Selzer at Type Foundry Studio, Portland, OR; produced by The Lil’ Smokies, Missoula, MT, 2013.

This terrific young band from Missoula has released its self-titled first effort, crammed with 10 originals, after using the online tool Kickstarter to raise donations from fans.

When the musicians got together in 2009, they played traditional bluegrass tunes. They were authentic, raw and wonderful.

They’ve branched out with their debut, and are still wonderful. Maybe more so, since they’re more polished while charting a new path. Earlier this year they won the 2013 Northwest String Summit Band Competition in North Plains, OR – the first of many honors to come.

They sometimes sound like David Grisman or the Punch Brothers, but they’re not so esoteric. It’s pop, in that it’s rich with melody, hooks, vocal and instrumental harmonies, and superb technique. Weaving lots of influences into a sound that appeals to the mainstream takes talent. These guys have it.

Members are Cameron Wilson, mandolin, Pete Barrett, guitar and vocals, Matt Cornette, banjo, Andy Dunnigan, Dobro and vocals, Scott Parker, upright bass and vocals, and Jesse Brown, fiddle and vocals.

Dunnigan’s “Decades” starts with a hypnotic and repeating riff, while the mandolin chops percussively. There’s a cool vocal harmony. The fiddle bursts into roiling jazzy undertones, then mando, Dobro and banjo take it and run.

Dunnigan’s “The Toothfairy” is a bat-out-of-hell bluegrassier with a bunch of breaks that meld into a unison riff, each instrumentalist jumping into the fray at a supersonic pace. The piece gets wacky before the end, spazzing out till the abrupt ending. Tight!

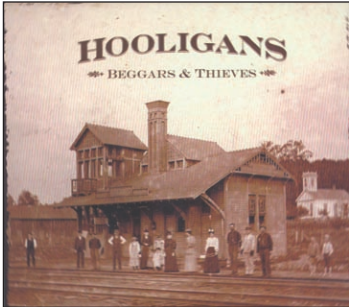
Wilson’s “Courtney” is a thoughtful and lovely instrumental ballad, thick with deep bass notes, a drop-D sound that sails along, high bell-like mando tones and quivering Dobro.

“Mending the Fence” has an almost orchestral flavor and great harmony singing on the hook: “I guess this is why they said the broken heart’s the worst.” The guys insert many themes and tempos into their work, adding an exciting and pleasing edge to the compositions.

The Dunnigan/Parker collaboration “Ships” starts with a soaring Dobro and fiddle line, then halfway through, the band teeters momentarily to a quiet interplay. The bass burbles, mando and guitar build the rhythm into a rock feel, and the song rockets away again.

Next is Cornette’s speedy “Straightfire,” with its light-speed licks. The album’s finale is a sweetly-rendered waltz, “Whiskey,” written by the late guitarist/songwriter Aaron Anderson, one of the band’s original members. The CD is dedicated to him, and it’s a keeper.

Visit the artists at www.reverbnation.com/thelilsmokies.



Chad Fadely: Amity Road

Recorded by Chad Fadely at his home studio in Missoula, MT; additional recording by Richie Reinholdt at Animaltown Studios, Missoula, and by engineers at The Harrison Studio Project, San Francisco, CA, and The Acoustic Shed, Pendleton, OR, 2013.

Missoula mandolin player Chad Fadely’s fourth album is all instrumental, all the time, replete with his own material. And that’s just fine because the consummate picker, a mainstay of many area bands, has put out another good one.

He’s gathered a gaggle of stellar musicians to assist him, sharing the spotlight with Larry Chung, banjo, Isaac Callender, fiddle, Andy Dunnigan, Dobro, and Richie Reinholdt, guitar. Callender contributes bass, too, as does Ted Lowe. Fadely plays a bit of guitar and mandola on a couple as well.

The fellas launch into the rolling and melodic “Garland County” at the outset. Each gets to stretch out on breaks, leading up to a clean, tight ending. An old-style, bluesy dirge is next, started off by sleek Dobro sounds. Fadely enters delicately with a simple, tasty lead line and Reinholdt throws in some scalding guitar chords mixed with stinging high notes in an inventive solo.

The toe-tappin’ bluegrass picker “TDI” fires up with deft banjo, cookin’ on through to the surprising ending.

Fadely is a master at writing melodies that sound familiar, yet maintain originality, in a genre that sounds cookie-cutter at times. On “Vicki’s Waltz,” written for his wife, he plays a wealth of tremolo chords to a dreamy effect.

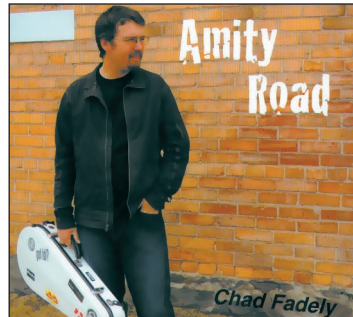
“Here We Go” stays pretty much on the C chord, with hands-down fine pickin’. A bit of arpeggio work and flat notes from Reinholdt’s guitar fires up the tune, the Dobro slithers in, then the two answer each other at the end. Cool!

The mover, “Hwy 105,” lays some rubber on the asphalt. The mando kicks it off before giving way to some nifty banjo work. Blistering guitar ensues and the Dobro snaps notes like rubber bands.

“Welcome to Slough” is the most unusual tune on the CD. It has an odd timing on the signature lick, and each picker gets to explore, taking a breath before bursting in on the four chord. Cascading rivulets of notes give the tune depth; Callender’s fiddle joins in on this great arrangement.

“Crossing the Flathead” is a lovely looper, and Fadely’s mandola highlights the finale, “For Hailey.” It sports a little fiddle muscle to round things out.

Cool arrangements abound on this album because Fadely knows what works and what doesn’t, making for fine listening. Solid production all around seals the deal. Visit the artist at www.chadfadely.com.



Montana A Cappella Society: Stories of America

Recorded live by Jason and Deborah Hicks at Corvallis United Methodist Church, Corvallis, MT; produced by the Montana A Cappella Society, 2013.

The Bitterroot Valley’s well-traveled choral group is at it again with their new release. The volunteer ensemble of community singers toured Ireland in April, after accepting an invitation to perform at the International Choral Festival in Cork.

This diverse collection, their third release since 2007, comprises 19 goodies that came out of preparations for the festival; they span light years in the American musical lexicon, from the 13th century on.

The repertoire is divided into four smaller sets: “Romantic Stories,” “Stories of the Soul,” “Stories of Resistance,” and “Travelin’ Stories.” Popular tunes of the day, spirituals, songs of the sea, musical numbers, and even a ’50’s doo-wop song, have their day.

Liner notes by artistic director Don Matlock remind us that music from all over the world ended up in the melting pot that is the U.S. The Montana A Cappella Society distilled this stew and took it on the road.

There’s the rousing dance number, “At the Chocolate Bon-Bon Ball,” in which the “bum-bum-bum” of the men’s bass notes counter the ladies’ lyric-tumbling lead vocals. Or take the eerie film-score nuances, vast and sweeping like the prairie, of “Cool Water.” The lead vocal is coupled with a high and sweet soprano repeating “water” in the background, making for a nifty arrangement by Matlock.

Following that are a couple seafaring numbers. First is “Fareweel Tae Tarwathie,” a robust waltz about whale-hunting. Then we segue to “Frobisher Bay,” that enters with seabirds on the wind; we hear a breath, then a sound, fraught with foreboding and longing. “‘One more whale,’ our captain cried, ‘one more whale and we’ll beat the ice.’” Voices sing the melody in unison, then break into three-part harmony on the chorus.

“The Bard of Armagh” is a traditional Irish song whose melody was borrowed for “The Streets of Laredo”; and “I’ve Been ‘Buked” is a traditional spiritual from the 19th century, with an interjected “yes!” and a “yo!” for punch. “Danny Boy” starts quickly, soon morphing into a more familiar pace after a key change, sweet and sad.

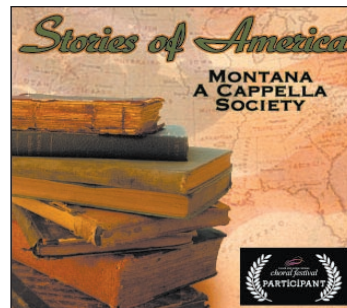
Perhaps my favorite on the album, the modern spiritual “Nothin’ Gonna Stumble,” rocks! It slips in with whispered lyrics, soulful and snappy, vociferous and bluesy. In another really cool arrangement, the voices build with the hopeful and joyous lyrics.

“Simple Gifts” is a Shaker song from the 1800s, and the traditional American hymn “Down to the River to Pray” highlights the chorale’s harmonies. In “I Want Jesus,” the men and women alternate on the lead, trade a repeated “walk with me” in cool counterpoint, and the song builds to a long soprano sustain that ends with a bluesy feel. Hallelujah!

The CD has good production values as well, especially for a live performance, thanks to Jason and Deborah Hicks, who recorded it live at Corvallis United Methodist Church.

The Montana A Cappella Society will perform “Gifts of the Season,” a free concert for the community, at 8 p.m. Dec. 21 at the Hamilton Performing Arts Center. Guest guitarist John Floridis of Missoula will join them.

Visit www.mtacappella.com for more information.



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State of the Arts welcomes CDs

State of the Arts welcomes CD submissions by Montana musicians for inclusion in the About Music section. The recordings must be professional, commercially available, full-length CDs, with cover art and liner notes. Brief biographical information on band members would be helpful to the writer.

Please send submissions to either the Montana Arts Council, PO Box 202201, Helena, MT, 59620; or *Lively Times*, 33651 Eagle Pass Trl., Charlo, MT 59824.